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FACT SHEET

L-980

PLANTING AND TRAINING PECAN TREES

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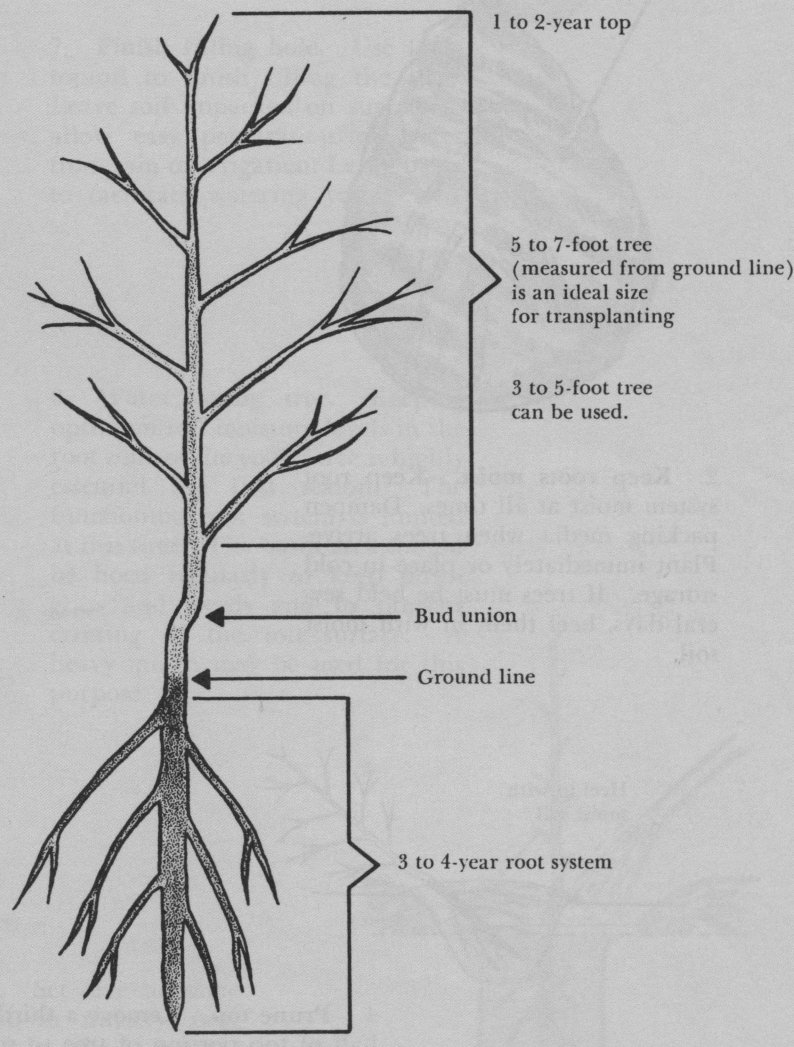
Proper planting and training of pecan trees is one of the most important practices in a complete orchard management program. The pecan has gained the reputation of being a difficult tree to transplant yet we have growers who plant thousands of trees with less than a two percent loss. The three keys to success in transplanting pecan trees are as follows:

1. Obtain vigorous and fresh pecan nursery stock.
2. Keep root system moist at all times.
3. Reduce the budded or grafted top by a third to a half at time of planting.

The accompanying set of drawings and descriptive captions are designed to outline the basic steps in transplanting and training pecan nursery stock.



1. **Obtain good trees.** Sturdy, vigorous trees from a reliable nursery source should be used. The root system should be free of crown gall or nematode damage and the top should be well grown and must be identified correctly as to the variety desired. A moderate-sized nursery tree will suffer less "transplant shock" and usually will become established and grow off faster than a large tree.

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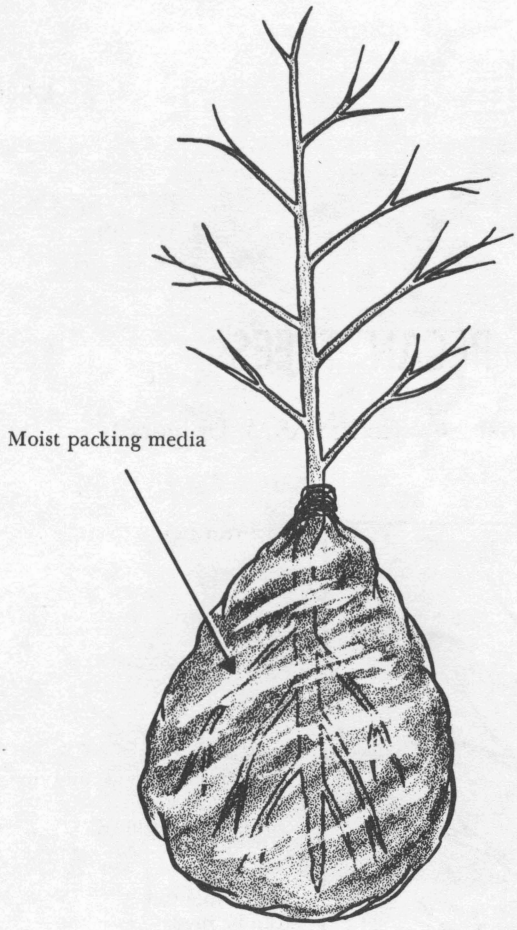
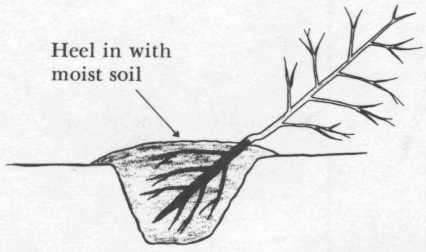
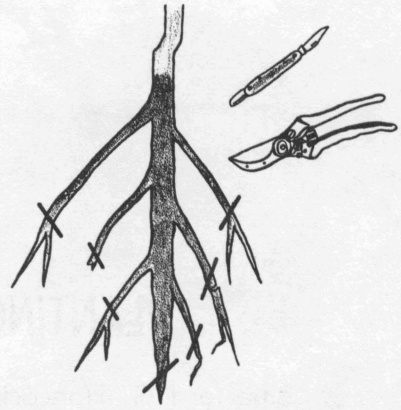
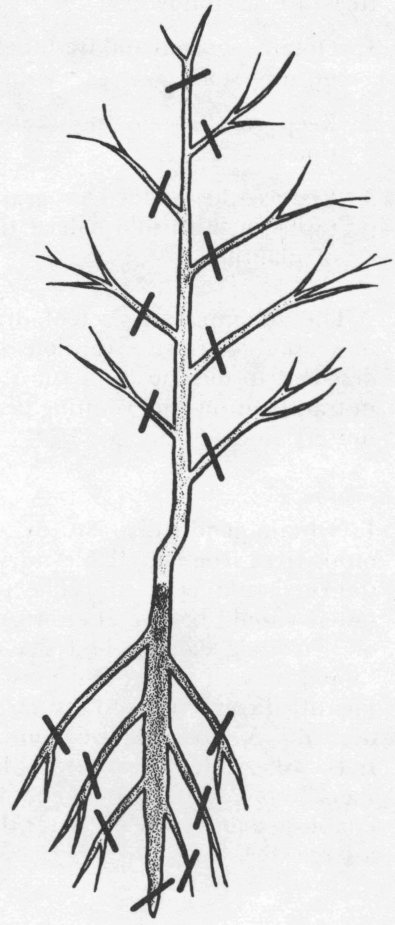


2. **Keep roots moist.** Keep root system moist at all times. Dampen packing media when trees arrive. Plant immediately or place in cold storage. If trees must be held several days, heel them in with moist soil.

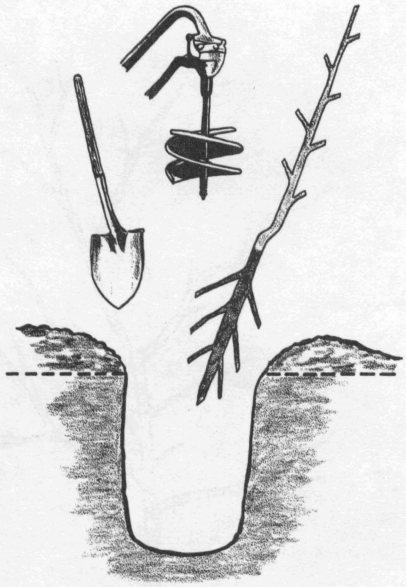




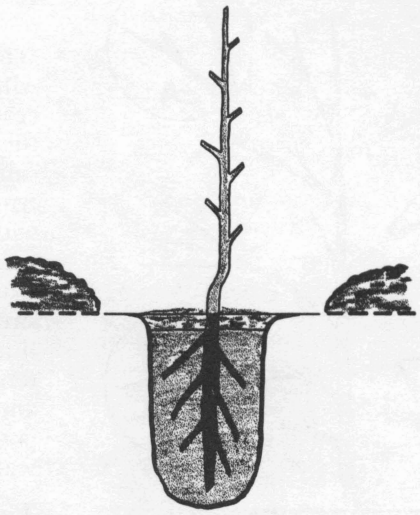
3. **Trim root system.** Cut off all broken and bruised roots with sharp shears or knife. Most new roots develop on side roots and not more than 10 inches from the tap. Examine the roots closely to assure freedom of serious disease or insect infestation.



4. **Prune top.** Remove a third to half of top portion of tree to compensate for the loss of a major part of the functioning root system when tree was dug. If nursery tree has light or no branching, cut off a third to half of the main trunk (whip).

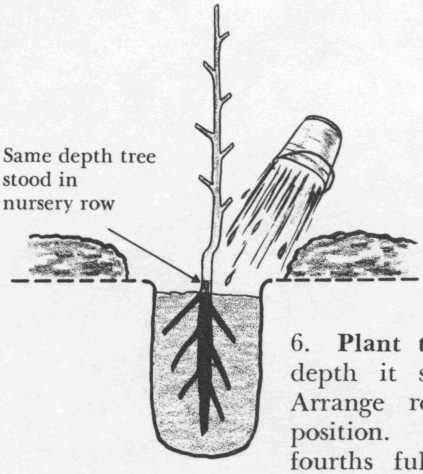


5. **Dig hole.** Hole should be just wide and deep enough to accommodate the root system of the tree without bending any of the roots. If the soil is so heavy-textured or so devoid of fertility to require the digging of a large hole, it is not suitable for the growing of pecans on a commercial basis. A power-driven auger, 12 to 18 inches in diameter, is an excellent implement for digging tree planting holes when a sizeable orchard is being set.

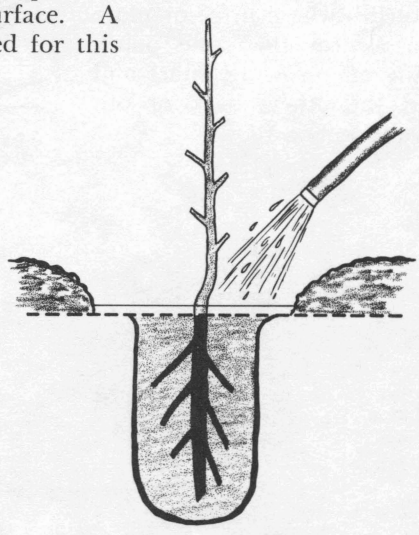


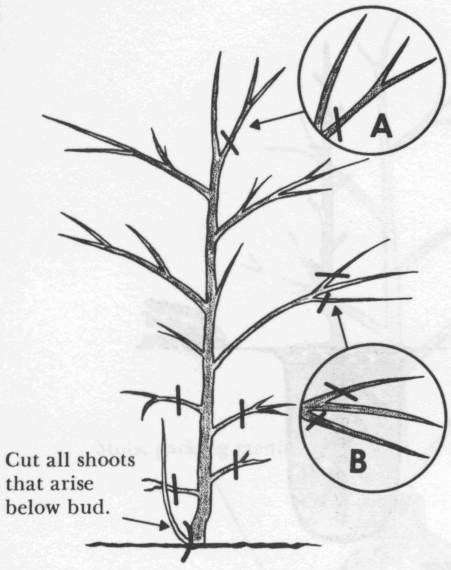
7. **Finish filling hole.** Use loose topsoil to finish filling the hole. Leave soil unpacked on surface to allow easy penetration of water from rain or irrigation. Leave basin to facilitate watering young tree.

8. **Water young tree.** Keeping optimum soil moisture levels in the root zone of the young tree is highly essential the first season. The functioning root system is limited at this time. The basin area should be hoed regularly to keep down grass and weeds and to prevent crusting of the soil surface. A heavy mulch may be used for this purpose.



6. **Plant tree.** Set tree at same depth it stood in nursery row. Arrange roots in their natural position. Fill hole about three-fourths full of friable top soil. Work soil around roots. Pour water into hole to settle soil, eliminate air pockets and keep roots moist.



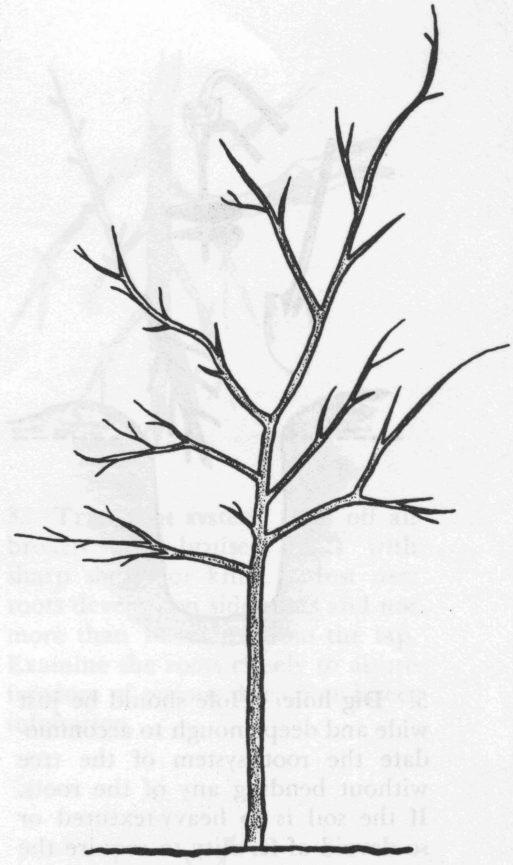


9. **Train young tree.** During first and second growing seasons, let all shoots from buds on trunk (above union) grow. When shoots on the lower portion of the trunk start vigorous growth, cut them back to a length of 4 to 6 inches and keep them at this length. This "trashy trunk" method of training will protect trunk from sunscald and from wind damage. It will make the trunk increase in diameter and strength at a much faster rate. Cut off all water sprouts or suckers that develop below the bud union.

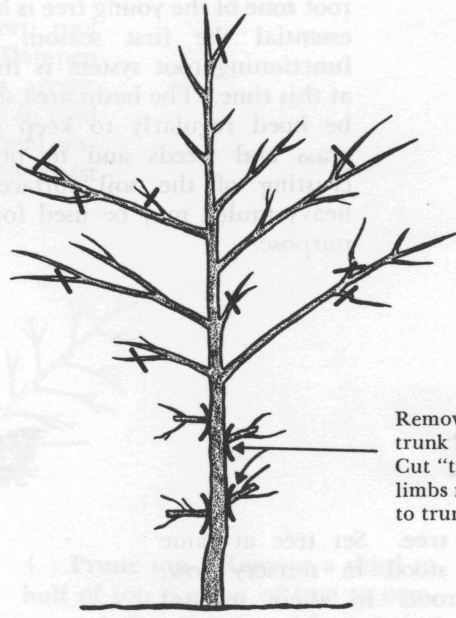
Eliminate "Y" crotches by cutting one of the forks back or completely off. (See inset A.) Correct "crows feet" crotches where three or more limbs arise near the same point, by leaving one growing intact and then cut the others back or off. (See inset B.)

10. **Prune pecan trees.** Continue to eliminate "Y" crotches and "crows feet" as tree grows. This will help build strong wide-angle crotches. The top at the end of the second or third growing seasons can shade the trunk and then the trunk will be strong enough to withstand wind drift so that the branches on the lower part of the trunk may be removed. The desired height of the permanent lower limbs on a pecan tree will be determined by the climate, spacing and cultural procedures. It usually is not advisable to have permanent scaffold limbs lower than 5 to 6 feet.

This pruning is done during the growing season. Foliage intentionally not shown for purposes of clarity.



11. **Results of proper planting and training.** A pecan tree that is trained correctly in the early growing seasons will develop a good system of scaffold limbs. This strong framework of branches can withstand high winds, ice and snow, and the weight of heavy crop loads.



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